

# **23<sup>rd</sup> Nordic Symposium of the ISAE**



**January 19-21, 2011  
Dorpat Conference Centre, Tartu, Estonia**

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## PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF FINNISH DAIRY PRODUCERS REGARDING DISBUDDING OF CALVES

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Disbudding is a common procedure in dairy farms because hornless cattle are supposed to be safer among themselves and for humans. However, this procedure causes severe pain-related distress and behavioural changes in calves. Local anaesthesia and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs are effective for treating disbudding-related pain. Dairy farmers have a key role in whether or not calves to be disbudded are properly medicated; thus, we conducted this study to characterize perceptions and practices of Finnish dairy producers with regard to disbudding of calves and disbudding-related pain management.

We designed and mailed a questionnaire to 1,000 Finnish dairy producers and published the same questionnaire on the internet. A total of 451 questionnaires (45%) were returned from the random sample and 738 dairy producers responded in the internet. Thus, we got responses from 10.6% of all 11,244 dairy farms in Finland. We found out that 84% of Finnish dairy producers disbud their calves, and 69% of these farms use a veterinarian at least sometimes to medicate their calves prior to disbudding.

We asked respondent's opinions about disbudding-related pain with no pain medication (answers on an 11-point numerical rating scale were classified into three groups: mild pain 0-3, moderate pain 4-7, and severe pain 8-10) and the agreement with disbudding-related statements (a five-point Likert scale, in which one corresponded to complete disagreement and five to complete agreement). We analyzed the factors affecting respondents' opinions on the need to use pain medication for the disbudding procedure with ANOVA. Producers who ranked disbudding-related pain as severe agreed more with the statement "I could never disbud calves without any pain alleviation" than producers who estimated pain as mild or moderate ( $3.75 \pm 0.13$  (mean  $\pm$  SE) for severe pain,  $2.25 \pm 0.23$  for mild pain and  $2.49 \pm 0.15$  for moderate pain,  $p < 0.001$ ). Also they agreed less with the statement "It is too expensive to have a veterinarian medicate calves prior to disbudding" ( $3.12 \pm 0.18$  for severe pain,  $4.51 \pm 0.36$  for mild pain and  $3.76 \pm 0.20$  for moderate pain,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Producers who rank disbudding-related pain without any medication severe appear to also take the calves' disbudding pain and the need for pain alleviation more seriously and thus may be more motivated to use pain alleviation to calves prior to disbudding.